

WHAT WOMEN ARE EDUCATED FOR.

AMONG the observances of the London summer are now the annual meetings of the authorities of the Ladies' Colleges, which are a new feature in English society. The kinds of attention paid to these meetings, and of comment made upon them are very various. I am at present concerned with only one of the many points of view from which these institutions are regarded.

At the recent annual meeting of Queen's College (for Ladies), Harley Street, the chair was filled by the Right Honourable W. Cowper. The Dean of the College, and some of the Professors, several clergymen, and many friends of the pupils were present, as well as the main body of the pupils. Having had opportunity to see, through a long life, what men have, at this age of the world, been thinking for two generations about the education of women, I always read with interest the reports of such annual meetings as that at the Harley Street College, and amuse myself with marking the progress of opinion disclosed by the speakers. On the late occasion (July 4th), the chairman's speech was perhaps better understood in its bearings by some hearers and readers than by himself. My experience of men's minds on this particular subject satisfies me that Mr. Cowper believed himself to be exceedingly liberal in his views, so that he was doing something virtuous,—something that would win gratitude from one sex, if it did not inspire respect for his courage in the other, in asserting the claims of women to a good education. I have usually traced in the gentlemen present at such meetings a happy complacency, an air of amiable magnanimity, which it was unnecessary to find fault with,—it was so natural and so harmless;—a keen sense of the pleasures of generous patronage, in seeing that women have a fair opportunity of a better cultivation than had been given before; but it is not often that the complacency is so evident, and so self-confident, as in Mr. Cowper's speech of the 4th instant. He has evidently no misgiving about the height of his own liberality when he assumes that the grand use of a good education to a woman is that it improves her usefulness to somebody else. This is the turn that praise of female enlightenment has always taken among men till very lately, when one here and there ventures to assume that the first object of a good education is to improve the individual as an individual. Mr. Cowper has not got beyond

the notion of the majority of the friends of female education, who think they have said everything when they have recommended good intellectual training as fitting women to be "mothers of heroes," "companions to men," and so on. No great deal will be done for female improvement while this sort of sentiment is supposed to be the loftiest and most liberal.

Girls will never make a single effort, in any length of school years, for such an object as being companions to men, and mothers of heroes. If they work, and finally justify the pains taken for them in establishing such colleges as these, it will be for the same reasons that boys work well, and come out worthy of their schooling;—because they like their studies, and enjoy the sense of mental and moral development which is so strong in school and college years; and because their training is well adapted to educate, develop, and strengthen their powers, and render them as wise and good as their natures, years, and circumstances permit.

Till it is proposed, in educating girls, to make them, in themselves and for their own sakes, as good specimens of the human being as the conditions of the case allow, very little will be effected by any expenditure of pains, time, and money. I am assured of this by what I have constantly heard in the world from all the parties concerned; and anybody else may learn the same fact by listening to what all parties have to say.

The founders, managers, or authorities in all such institutions may be found at times talking over the inconceivable and incredible meanness of the parents of pupils or candidates for admission. The common plea is that the boys are so expensive that there is not much to spare for the girls' education. This is no particular concern of the college managers; but there are parents who seem to think that they are doing something virtuous in coming to bargain and haggle for the greatest amount of instruction for the smallest possible sum. They would not think of haggling with the master of the public school their boys go to. They pay down their hundred or two a-year for each boy; but, when it comes to the girls, they contrive, and assume, and beg, till they get in one or two younger girls on cheap terms, or send the governess to sit by as guardian, and pick up a lesson without pay. The mothers are apt to take credit for such management, on the ground of the trouble they have with the fathers to get any money out of them for college-lessons, when a governess (if they could find a paragon of one for a reasonable salary) might "educate" any number of girls for the same terms as one. It does not particularly concern the college managers what the fathers say at home about family plans: but they hear a good deal about it, through the expositions the mothers think fit to make of their own virtue and ability in contriving to get their daughters' education done as cheaply as possible.

But this may not be a true account of the fathers' notions, I may be reminded. I rather think it is, in the majority of cases. It is not only in newspapers, in angry letters called forth by some new phase of female education or employment, that fathers inquire what possible use there

can be in learning this or that. While a narrow-minded commercial man says, in a newspaper effusion, that girls should be fitted for managing the house and doing the needlework, and that all study beyond this is mischievous; a common-place professional man says, at his own table or his club, that it ought not to cost much to teach his girls as much as it is good for them to know: that the whole college course at Harley Street or Bedford Square is more than he thinks it right to afford while his boys are at school. Not that it is a costly education: it is very much otherwise, considering its quality: but he cannot see the use of making the girls so learned. In fact, he has told his wife how much he will spend on the girls, and she may get for them as much as she can for the money.

And what are the girls thinking meantime? An old hermit cannot undertake to report their views, which are probably very seldom uttered. But it is clear, from the college reports, and by what is known in the world of the results thus far, that the young ladies are disposed to be industrious, are highly intelligent, and cheerful and happy amidst their intellectual pursuits. We may fairly suppose therefore that they either see a use in what they learn, or learn for other reasons than the thought of utility: that in school and classrooms they are, in short, like their brothers. The boys are not encouraged to study for such a reason as becoming intelligent companions to somebody hereafter, or being the fathers of great men. The boys know that they are to be made as wise as they can be made under their conditions; that the knowledge they gain is a good in itself; and that their fathers do not, in paying their bills, pause in doubt whether they are justified in spending so much money for such an object as the enlightenment of their children. If I may guess at the secret thoughts of young girls at their desks, I should say that they have higher and truer notions of the operation, value, and fitness of knowledge in their own case than many of their parents. Possibly some of them could teach the chairman of their annual meeting that there are better reasons for their being well educated than the prospect he holds out of their "influence" hereafter—the use they are to be of in furthering the objects of men.

I am not unmindful, however, of the great advance made—the remarkable conquest of prejudice—within a few years. It required some courage, till within a few years, to speak of any sort of college in connection with female studies: and nothing short of heroism and every kind of magnanimity was requisite to make any man offer himself for a professorship in such colleges. It is very different now, though too many of my acquaintances still perpetually fall into the old notion that women have no occasion for intellectual cultivation. I have never wondered at, nor much regretted, the dislike to the very name of "college," considering what we have seen done, and heard said, in foreign institutions bearing that title. There are great joint-stock company's schools in America, advertised and glorified under the name of colleges, from which English parents and brothers would flee away, and take refuge in

the wild woods, rather than "assist" at an annual meeting. The public exhibition of intellect and sensibility, the recitations, the compositions, the essays on metaphysical or moral subjects, the prize-giving, the newspaper reports of the pupils,—all this, and the dreadful hollowness and abominable taste of the whole display, might well cause English fathers to start back from the first mention of female colleges at home. So might the continental celebrations which we still witness occasionally, where the most virtuous school girl is crowned in the presence of a throng of visitors; and where virtue in detail—honour, sensibility, fidelity, &c., &c.—is rewarded by prizes and praises. But it is now understood that our colleges for ladies have nothing in common with institutions in which these terrible exhibitions can take place. Our young maidens altogether decline publicity, and could not condescend to try for prizes or accept praises. They are plainly zealous for the honour of their college; but no one of them has anything to gain for herself beyond the privileges of learning and art. There is a wider difference between such colleges as we see annually glorified in American journals and those of Bedford Square and Harley Street than between these last and the closest and narrowest education given in an aristocratic school-room, by an unrelieved governess, to two or three secluded and spiritless girls who never heard a masterly exposition of anything in their lives. But due credit should be given to such fathers of the present generation as have surmounted their horror at the name of colleges for young ladies.

The whole significance of the matter—the whole importance of the assumption involved in Mr. Cowper's speech about qualifying women by education to "stir up man" and improve the nation—can hardly be seen without reverting to some of the stages that women have passed through within two or three generations, and then turning to some recent discussions which have caused a strong sensation in London society, and a good deal beyond it.

There was a great notion of making women learned several times during the last century. We know almost as much of the reign of the female pedants as of the history of any political party in the time of George III. I do not wish to dwell on the subject, for there was nothing in the writings of the Blues of the last century which need detain us now, or which would have obtained praise in any society where women were duly respected,—which is the same thing as being truly appreciated. We need not trouble ourselves now with the Seward, the Carters, the Vesays, Hamiltons, Mores, Montagues, and others who, without anything like the genuine knowledge now attainable by women, poured out sentiment and fancies which they mistook for intellectual products. We need not pause on these, nor criticise their works; but I must mention them, in order to recall the Blue-stocking stage of female education, and also because they are a foil to the really well-educated women of the period. I knew the Miss Berrys, and the Miss Baillies, and the empress of her sex in her own time and after,—Mrs. Barbauld. The Miss Berrys were a favourable specimen of the Blue

order : not only clever and well read, but enlightened :—rather blue, certainly, but sensible, kindly, sufficiently practical for their position—in short, certainly the better for their intellectual cultivation, and in no way the worse for it. The Baillies were not Blue. Joanna's genius was too strong and natural to be overlaid by any amount of reading she was disposed to undertake. All the sources of wisdom were open to her ;—Nature, books, and life : and she drew from them all in happy proportion ; so that she became the wise and happy woman that every wise father would desire his daughter to be in herself, whatever she might also do for, and be to other people. If Joanna Baillie had written nothing, she would have been the beloved and revered being that she is in all memories. The only difference is that her lot as an author affords further evidence of the robust character of her mind, in the equal serenity with which she regarded the rise, and culmination, and decline of her own fame. No seat of irritability seems to have been ever touched, more or less, by such a celebrity as very few women have ever attained, or by that extinction of her fame, which must have appeared to her unjust, if the fame had been itself a delusion. Less celebrated, but hardly less highly endowed, and more thoroughly educated than Joanna Baillie, or perhaps any other woman of her time, was Mrs. Barbauld, whose few but exquisite writings still kindle enthusiasm in duly qualified readers who happen to pick up anything of hers in their path of study.

Her father educated her with her brother ; and we see in her noble style, full of power, clearness, and grace, one of the results of her sound classical training. We see others in her compactness of thought, and closeness of expression ; while the warm glow of sentiment, pure as the sunlight, excludes all appearance of pedantry, or unsuitableness to the hour in which she wrote. Fox pronounced her "Essay on the Inconsistency of Human Expectations," "the finest essay in the English language,"—no one being more aware than he must have been of the classical origin of the train of thought, so admirably conveyed in vivid English. The strength and discipline of her moral nature were only too well proved by the experience of her married life. She underwent, with noble outward serenity, a long and excruciating trial from her husband's insanity, which ended in suicide. The "Dirge," which remains among her poems, discloses to those who knew her something of what lay under the dignity and calm which she preserved for his sake. The strain and shock induced an indolence, or reluctance to act, and make any appearance, which has deprived us of much which she would no doubt have written, if she had not lost the spirit and gaiety of her early life ; but we have enough to understand how it was that her reason and fancy swayed all minds that approached her own, and her words burned themselves in on the memories of all who fell in with them. Having read anything of hers at all, it was irresistible to read it again ; and probably nothing of hers ever needed to be read more than twice. Her essays related mainly to the topics of the time : and the time was one of political and

moral conflict throughout the country ; yet I have been eagerly inquired of by young persons within a few years as to anything I could tell of Mrs. Barbauld, because she had kindled their souls by some legacy of words which seemed to them like the newest and rarest of gifts.

Her father certainly did not train her to be somebody's companion, or somebody's mother. He treated her and her brother alike, with the view of freely opening to both the way to wisdom. Her education was a pure blessing to her. It was to her what she briefly and brilliantly describes intellectual pursuits to be in her celebrated essay. Her firm grasp of philosophy, her student-like habit of mind, and the scholarly discipline she underwent did not impair, in the slightest degree, her womanly grace, her delicate reserve, or the glow of her friendships. It is true, she was not much of a needlewoman. There is a tradition that the skeleton of a mouse was found in her workbag ; but this kind of disinclination is seen in women who know no language but their own, and whose ideas do not range beyond their own street. As her husband's aider in the work of his great school at Palgrave, and as a motherly hostess to the little boys, she was tenderly remembered by some men of distinction who had stood at her knee. A nobler and sweeter presence than Mrs. Barbauld's I have never witnessed ; and I have heard from some of her own generation that her sprightliness was once as bewitching as her composure was afterwards pathetic.

In the next generation after the Blues of the last century, there seems to have been a sort of reaction in regard to the education of at least the middle-class girls. As far as I have heard from many quarters, the mothers of the early part of this century were less informed, less able in even the common affairs of life, than those who immediately preceded and followed them. There were, of course, reasons for this ; but I cannot go into them now. It is enough to recal to the memory of old people what they heard in their childhood of the boarding-schools, sewing-schools, and day-schools in which their mothers had received their education, as it was called. I remember the fame of a school which was always so crowded that the girls had hardly room to turn round, and none for any due care of their clothes ; a school so praised by distinguished church-folk as that the list of candidates for admission was always full ; a school which I might describe at some length, to the amazement of modern readers, but of which I will mention only one characteristic fact—that the religious instruction of Sunday (in addition to church-going) was learning by heart four lines of "Paradise Lost," leaving off (till next Sunday) whether there was a stop or not. There were sewing-schools, where girls sat on hard benches without backs, and without any support for the feet, stitching away for hours together, on fine materials, in any sort of light that might happen ; so that a large proportion came out of the process crooked, or squinting, or with back-ache or near sightedness for life, and a sad habit of low spirits. There were country or seaside schools, where the girls learned to gather fruit and vegetables, and to play trap-ball, and perhaps to dance, as well as to

say their catechism and darn stockings; all very good, but not quite enough, according to our notions. The pupils themselves, when parents, desired more for their children; and there was a movement—I remember it well, because it involved my sisters and cousins—in favour of an education more like that of boys, and conducted chiefly by masters. It was a great blessing to the girls, but it was a random effort. In one town, most of the middle-class girls would be taught Latin, if not Greek and mathematics, really well; while in other towns, a miserable smattering of French (as English French was before the Peace) was considered enough in the way of languages, and even arithmetic, beyond the four first rules, was postponed to the piano. There was, however, a marked improvement: and the hardness of the times, introducing competition into the governess department, directed more attention upon education. From that day to this the whole conception of the objects and methods of education has been expanding and improving; and perhaps not even the city Arabs now gathered into ragged schools have more reason to be thankful for the change than the girlhood of England and Scotland. As Mr. Cowper justly observed at Harley Street, it is the well-grounded and systematic instruction, the habit of co-ordinated study, which is so valuable to the minds of women. Our Ladies' Colleges are rapidly familiarising society with this view of female study; schools are formed for the purpose of preparing pupils for the college, and the quality of governesses is rising in full proportion to the new means of training now put within their reach. Through them, as well as by natural incitements of example and sympathy, the improvement will spread from the middle classes upwards. If aristocratic parents will not as yet send their daughters to colleges, where future governesses and professional and mercantile men's daughters study together, they will soon demand a higher order of instruction from the exclusive schoolmistresses, governesses, and masters whom they employ. Hitherto their children have undoubtedly had the advantage in learning well what they do learn,—modern languages, English reading and writing, and the practice of the arts. Now, they must extend their scheme.

This brings us to my last topic,—the recent exciting discussion about Belgravian young ladies. The only part of it that I need notice here is that which seems to have excited least interest elsewhere; and that is, the actual quality of the Belgravian young ladies whose interests have been so freely discussed.

I regret the discussion, because I believe it will be injurious to English reputation abroad. No Englishman, in any part of the world, will believe, any more than his wife or mother, that "the Belgravian Lament" was written by a woman, or any number of women: but we cannot expect the same true instinct in Americans, French, Italians, or even Germans. I regret that a statement, practically libellous, has been floated at home, which will go the round of the world, and be harboured in some corner of it for future mischief. This is enough to say of the original incident, and of the mischievous introduction to newspaper

treatment of the gravest and most perplexing of moral questions.

What concerns us now is,—the view taken, all round, of the young ladies of the upper classes. The notion that the aim of their lives is an advantageous marriage can be held only by men who have no acquaintance with them. Those who have may be indignant when the conception of the low-bred satirist is sent forth into the world as fact, and left uncontradicted, as the libel in this case necessarily is; but none of the associates of those young ladies will feel less respect for them now than they did six weeks ago. It needs no explaining in Belgravian, any more than other society, that mothers and daughters are not always thinking of and planning for advantageous marriage. If observation is newly excited by what has been said, it will take the turn of noting what is the aim, and therefore what the quality, of female education in that class.

I have seen something of that order of young ladies; and what I have observed obliges me to believe that they are at least as well provided with independent objects and interests as middle-class girls. One family rises up before my mind,—sensible parents and their five daughters (saying nothing here of the sons). The parents provided instruction for each girl, according to her turn and ability: and when each grew up to womanhood, she had free scope for her own pursuit. One was provided with a painting-room, and another with a music-room, and all appliances and means: a third had a conservatory and garden; and all lived in a society of the highest cultivation. They had as much as they wished of the balls and fêtes we hear so much about; and there was nothing to distinguish them from other young ladies who are now subjected to such insolent speculation from below: but I am confident that it could never have entered the head of the veriest coxcomb of their acquaintance that any of the family were speculating in marriage. Four of them married well, in the best sense, though not all grandly. The fifth died, after many years of illness. There is every reason to believe that English girls have the simplicity, intelligence, and kindness of their order in one rank of life as in another; and certainly not least in that class which is surrounded, from its birth upwards, by an atmosphere of refinement derived from intelligence.

What, then, are they educated for? This is the great question, in their case as in that of middle-class girls.

For the most part, their education is probably a matter of sympathy and imitation. In this or that way they may best learn what every girl is expected to learn. Beyond this, there is usually but a dim notion of the object, and as little notion as elsewhere of the great single or paramount aim of education,—to raise the quality of the individual to the highest attainable point. I believe that the parents fall short of this conception, like most other parents of daughters: but I am confident that they are yet further from the other extreme,—of universally and audaciously breeding up their daughters for the matrimonial market. One evidence that is before our eyes tells a great deal. The unmarried women of the upper classes

seem to be at least as well occupied with natural and useful pursuits as those of any other rank; and more so perhaps, in proportion to their greater command of means for accomplishing their purposes and gratifying their tastes. Some may do a little mischief in attempting to do good: some may get into a foolish metaphysical school in their study of German: some may lose themselves among the religious sects of the day in the course of their polemical or antiquarian studies: but I doubt whether one could anywhere find more satisfactory specimens of single women, amiable and cheerful, because satisfied and occupied,—with friends enough for their hearts, and business enough for head and hands.

What is the truth, I wonder, about the "fast young ladies" we read so much about? I am out of the world; but I cannot find that anybody who is in it has actually seen the young ladies who talk of "awful swells" and "deuced bores," who smoke, and venture upon free discourse, and try to be like men. In Horace Walpole's time, as in Addison's, there were "fast young ladies," as we see in many a letter of Walpole's, and many a paper of the "Spectator." Probably there were some in every age, varying their doings and sayings, according to the fopperies of the time. Have we more than the average proportion? I do not know. One obvious remark on the case of the girls so freely discussed has scarcely, I think, been sufficiently made; that the two commonest allegations against them are incompatible. We hear of their atrocious extravagance in dress and peculiarity of personal habits; and, in the next breath, of their lives being one unremitting effort to obtain a husband. Now, in my long life, I have witnessed nothing like the opposition set up by men, within the last seven years, to certain modes of female dress and manners: yet the modes remain. The ladies are steady. I wish their firmness was shown in a better cause; for I admire the fashions of the day as little as any man: but it is plain that the ladies, young and old, daughters and mothers, do not try to please men in their dress and behaviour. They choose to please themselves: and, whatever we may think of their taste, we cannot but admit their spirit of independence.

On the whole, I cannot see any evidence that women of any rank are, generally speaking, educated with a view to getting married: nor yet for the purpose of being companions to men, or the mothers of heroes; nor yet for the purpose of inspiring men to great deeds, and improving society; nor yet, except in a few scattered instances, to make the most of their own individual nature. There will be less confusion of thought, and dimness of aim, when the better instructed generation grows up. Meantime, in the midst of the groping among sympathies, and sentiments, and imitations, and ambitions, and imperfect views of all sorts, let us only have some few who uphold the claim of every human being to be made the most of, in all the provinces of its nature, and the female sex is redeemed. Women will quietly enter into their "rights," without objection on any hand, when those rights consist in their being more reasonable, more able, more

useful, and more agreeable than ever before, without losing anything in exchange for the gain.

FROM THE MOUNTAIN.